



## USS LST-771



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Builder: American Bridge Company, Ambridge, Pennsylvania

Commissioned: 18 October 1943

Decommissioned: 14 May 1946

Disposition: Sold for scrap on 26 September 1947 to Boston Metals Company, Baltimore, Maryland.

Length: 327' 9" oa

Beam: 50'

Draft: 1' 6" bow, 7' 5" stern (unloaded); 8' 2" bow, 14' 1" stern (loaded -- at sea); 3' 1" bow, 9' 6" (loaded -- beaching)

Displacement: 1,625 (light); 4,080 (w/ full load of 2,100 tons)

Propulsion: 2 x General Motors 12-567 diesels, twin shafts/rudders

Range: 24,000 nm @ 9 knots

Top Speed: 11.6 knots

Complement: 111

Troops: 163

Initial Armament: 7 x 40mm (single mount); 6 x 20 mm (single mount); 2 x .50-caliber mgs; 4 x .30-caliber mgs

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### **Commanding Officers:**

LT Robert Bracken: 17 October 1944 - 14 May 1946

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### **History:**

#### **USS LST-771**

#### **LST Flotilla 29, Group 87, Division 173**

The Coast Guard-manned USS *LST-771* was built at Ambridge, Pennsylvania and was ferried down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans where she was commissioned on 18 October 1944 under the command of LT Robert Bracken, USCG. After a week of shakedown at Panama City, Florida, she returned to New Orleans to take aboard *LCT-1276* and a Navy LCT crew and after loading asphalt and road building machinery at Gulfport, Mississippi, she departed for Pearl harbor via the Panama Canal and San Pedro, California, on 24 November 1944.

The "771" arrived at Pearl Harbor on 2 January 1945 and after unloading began taking aboard personnel and equipment of B Company, 715th Army Amphibious Tractor Battalion and men of the 93rd Anti-Aircraft Battalion, as well as 17 LVTs. She departed Pearl Harbor on January 27th and arrived at Leyte, Philippine Islands, on 25 February 1945, via Eniwetok, Ulithi and Kossol Passage, Palau. Here the 93rd Anti-Aircraft Battalion unloaded and new passengers to come aboard were 400 men of the 305th Battalion of the 77th Infantry Division. After nearly a month of amphibious exercises in Leyte Gulf she departed for the invasion of Kerama Rhetto. Here she landed troops on the tiny island of Aka Shima on 26 March 1945, 20 miles south of Okinawa. It was there that invading troops discovered nearly 80 small suicide boats the Japanese had carefully hidden in coves and caves ready to use at the moment of invasion. Not one was successfully used that day. For two days following, the 771 lay close in shore of one of the many Kerama Islands as a hospital ship receiving aboard for emergency treatment wounded troops brought out from the beach. Later these wounded were carried to outlying hospital ships and transports where they were flown to rear area base hospitals. Each night the ships on the Bay of Kerama Rhetto steamed out to sea to avoid the new and constant threat of suicide boats and planes. On March 30th the LCT was launched. On 1 April 1945, the 771 loaded troops and amphtracs aboard and set out for sea for 15 days of "retirement cruising" southeast of Okinawa.

On 16 April 1945, the second assault landing was made this time on the tiny fortress like island of Ie Shima off the western shore of Okinawa. Again the 305th Battalion was landed by amphtracs of the 715th. The shore and air offensive was heavier than on previous landings. The 771 was back for a second day of the attack with reserve troops from a transport off Okinawa, 550 men of the 307th Battalion of the 77th Infantry Division. Sniper fire from the beach, directed at the 771 was ineffective. It was here that Ernie Pyle lost his life. That same night the 715th Tractor Battalion was landed on Okinawa. The LSTs participating in the initial assaults were almost all retiring to rear areas but the 771 was ordered to load aboard all cargo ammunition from the departing LSTs and serve as ammunition distribution ship in the Okinawa area. She commenced a shuttle service between Okinawa anchorages and Kerama Rhetto. Battleships, cruisers and

destroyers were supplied with ammunition during a time when more ammunition was being expended than in any other naval operation in history.

Lying in Kerama Rhetto anchorage at night with three other ammunition ships, the 771 was kept segregated at a safe distance from the other vessels. Nightly air attacks offered little sleep for crew members those weeks when general quarters sounded four or five times in one night. With the sound of general quarters alarm would come the familiar order over the public address system "Make smoke!" and a heavy blanket of fog would be laid over the anchorage, hiding ships from aircraft, provided the wind was light. Occasionally the 771, laying in the protective lee of Tokashiki Shima, would find herself bared to the night sky by a perverse wind and gun crews tightened and swore at their stations until the smoke drifted overhead again. Her ammunition all unloaded, the 771 now turned to a new task, this time gasoline distribution and fog oil for smoke generators and chemical smoke pots, loaded from an AKA. Ammunition may have been an uncomfortable load but this combination of gasoline and easily ignited smoke flares set an even sharper edge on the uneasiness of the ship's company. By the end of May, 1945, most of the men whom had not walked on solid ground for 120 days, set up a whimsical "real estate agency" for titles to land and attractive promontories on the islands, on the islands they had looked at but never set foot upon for the past two months. Occasionally two or three Japanese who had been hiding in the caves and brush of the islands would come down to the shore line waving white rags to ships lying offshore. At times they would surrender in parties of ten. Once a couple of Japanese waited two days on the beach for a ship to send a boat in to shore so they could surrender. Japanese soldiers were still eluding U. S. Army patrols on the Islands, grubbing food from the ground and confident, as one prisoner expressed it, of the islands being retaken shortly. The 771 became the target one warm May afternoon for one such character who was loose with a 3-inch mortar and shells he had apparently stored in the hills of Okkashiki in a hidden cave. His aim and angle were bad, however, but several shells landed just off the beach a hundred yards away. More landed short in the hills. The 771 was just upping anchor to move to a more comfortable berth when the well hidden mortarman bracketed the ship, but with yards to spare. He never bothered anyone after that. Finally at the end of May orders came to get underway to a rear area, after loading the entire deck with empty brass shell casings and powder cans, picked up from every battlegroup that entered the anchorage. They finally departed on 7 June 1945, for Saipan after almost two and a half months after the initial assaults on Kerama Rhetto.

A resupply trip to Okinawa was made on 14 July 1945 with equipment and personnel of the 1112th Naval Construction Battalion. Okinawa was not yet secure but there was less of the strain which marked the previous visit. Returning to Saipan a heavy typhoon was encountered. Arriving at Saipan on 14 August 1945, she was routed back to Pearl Harbor, arriving there on August 25th. Here she loaded company "B" of the U. S. Marine Corps, 8th Field Service Regiment and set forth for Sasebo, Japan on 2 September 1945. The war was over but work for LSTs in Japan was just beginning. From Sasebo to Manila and thence to Lingayen Gulf went the 771 to load Army Ordnance personnel and equipment for the occupation forces in Japan. She reached Wakayama on 22 October 1945. After unloading she returned to Manila on November 3rd, and once more loaded a last remnant of occupation troops at Lingayen Gulf, the 47th General Hospital of the U. S. Army. With tank and main decks loaded with ambulances, trucks and hospital equipment the 771 departed Lingayen Gulf on November 11th for Kure, Japan, once foremost of Japan's naval bases. The Inland Sea, a picture book part of Japan was now treacherous with mines. Thanksgiving Dinner at anchor off Hirowan, Japan, and then orders came to proceed to Saipan.

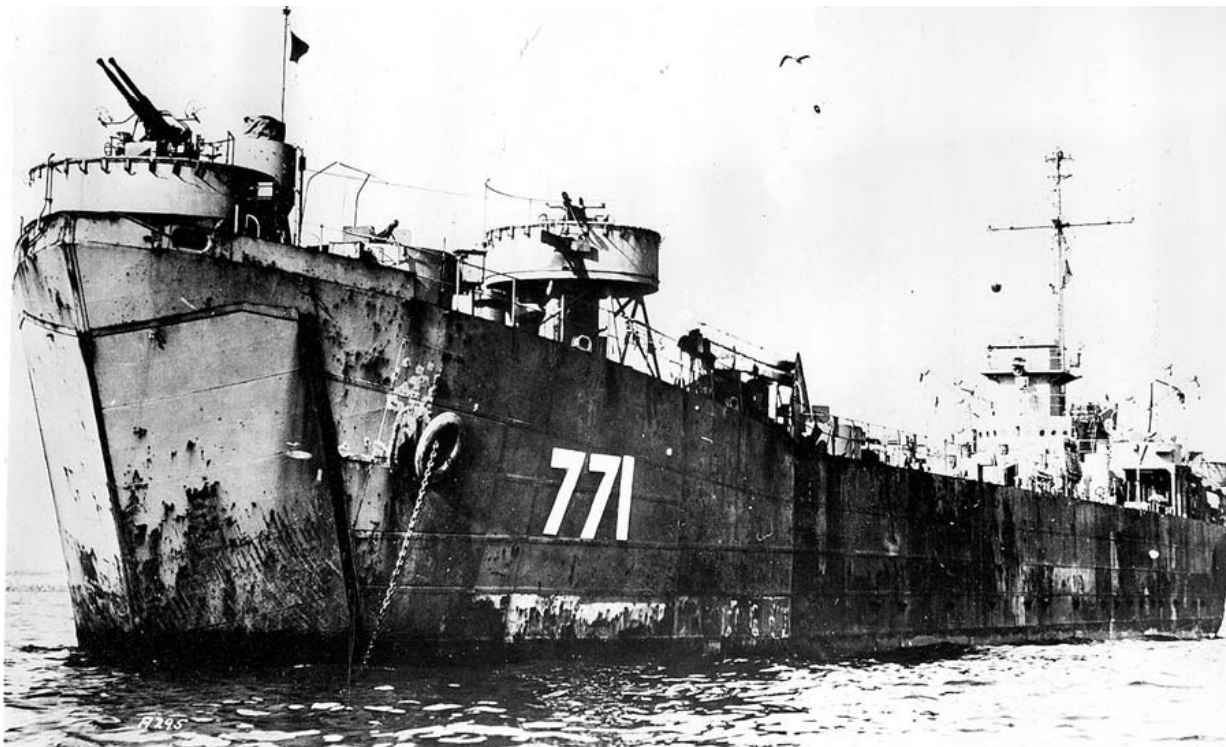
This could mean but one thing: Stateside! Departing Saipan flying the "going home" pennant a second Christmas was spent at sea before Pearl Harbor was reached. But by 3 January 1946, the 771 was leaving Pearl Harbor and she arrived at San Pedro on 14 January 1946. Here she was decommissioned on 14 May 1946.

The *LST-771* was awarded one battle star for her service during World War II.

## Photographs:



No original caption/date/photo number available; photographer unknown. Scans of this and the following photos of LST-771 were provided courtesy of Kenneth R. Stone, the son of a Coast Guardsman who served on board 771. He noted that "The original source for these photos was a service photographer who joined the ship's company during Kerama Rhetto. . .the photographer was very kind to mail these photos to the crew members after the war."





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**Sources:**

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